



BISHOPS' SYNOD FOR AFRICA

PROPOSITIONS

VATICAN CITY, 23 OCTOBER 2009

INTRODUCTION

Proposition 1

Documentation Presented to the Supreme Pontiff

The Synod Fathers submit to the Supreme Pontiff for his consideration the documentation on “The Church in Africa at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace.” You are the Salt of the Earth...You are the Light of the World” (Mt 5:13,14), associated with this Synod. This documentation includes: the “Lineamenta”, the “Instrumentum laboris”, the reports “ante” and “post disceptationem”, the texts of the interventions, both those presented in the synod hall and those “in-scriptis” and the reports on the deliberations in the small groups. In addition to these, the Synod Fathers make some concrete proposals which they hold to be of capital importance.

The Fathers humbly ask the Holy Father to consider the opportuneness of issuing a document on the Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace.

I - ECCLESIA IN SYNODO

Proposition 2

The Synod of a New Pentecost

If the First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops was declared “the Synod of the Resurrection and of Hope” (EIA, 13), the Synod Fathers, in communion with the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, view this Second Special Assembly as the Synod of a “New Pentecost”.

With gratitude to God, they thank the Holy Father for the auspicious initiative of convoking this synod.

The Synod Fathers are therefore content to witness the universal character of the synodal assembly in the presence of the Holy Father, his closest co-workers and representatives of the Church from the other continents.

They pray that the Spirit of Pentecost may renew our apostolic commitment to making reconciliation, justice and peace prevail in Africa and the rest of the world. May it also not let the immense problems weighing down Africa overcome us, so that we may become “salt of the earth” and “light of the world”.

May this exercise of ecclesial communion and collegial responsibility inspire other structures and forms of collaborative ministry in the Church-Family of God.

Proposition 3

Ecclesial communion

By her very nature, the Church is a communion which brings about an organic, pastoral solidarity. Bishops, in communion with the Bishop of Rome, are the foremost promoters of communion and collaboration in the Church's apostolate, in which priests, deacons, consecrated persons and the lay faithful participate. This communion of the Church is particularly seen in the Bishops' effective and affective collegiality in their Ecclesiastical Provinces and at the national, regional, continental and international levels.

Therefore, the Synod recommends that Bishops, Priests, Deacons the Religious and the Laity further strengthen their cooperation at the diocesan, national, continental and inter-continental levels. It also encourages further and ongoing cooperation between the "Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) and the "Confederation of the Conferences of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (COMSAM).

In this way, the Church becomes a more effective sign and promoter of reconciliation, justice and peace.

Proposition 4

Ecclesial Communion at the Regional and Continental Levels

The Synod Fathers give thanks to God for the work accomplished by SECAM/SCEAM (The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar), during the past forty years of its existence (1969-2009), the first instance of ecclesial communion at the continental level.

They desire that, in keeping with the Spirit of Pentecost, National Episcopal Conferences and the Assembly of the Catholic Hierarchy of Egypt renew their commitment to SECAM, in order to foster out a more fruitful pastoral ministry in Africa, with special reference to reconciliation, justice and peace.

Consequently, they encourage the Bishops in Africa to revive existing structures of ecclesial communion, especially COMSAM (The Confederation of the Conferences of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar) and promote others, such as:

- a continental council for the clergy;
- a continental council for the laity; and
- a continental council for Catholic women.

They request SECAM/SCEAM to explore and elaborate possible ways and means of ensuring fruitful collaboration within the said structures.

II - SYNODALIA THEMATA

A) Reconciliation

Proposition 5

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

God's grace creates a new heart in us and reconciles us with himself and with others. An essential element of "reconciliation" is the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is to be celebrated according to the canonical norms and in the spirit of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Reconciliatio et Poenitentia". It is a matter of restoring a great importance to the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance in its dual aspects: personal and communal.

Reconciliation on the social level contributes to peace. After a conflict, reconciliation restores unity of hearts and life in common. In virtue of reconciliation, nations long at war have again found peace, citizens ruined by civil war have rebuilt unity; individuals or communities seeking and granting pardon have healed their memories; divided families once again live in harmony. Reconciliation overcomes crises, restores dignity to people, and opens the way to development and lasting peace among people at all levels.

The Synod Fathers now launch a heartfelt appeal to all those who are at war in Africa and make their people suffer so much: “Stop the hostilities and be reconciled!”

They ask all African citizens and governments to recognize their brotherhood and promote initiatives of every sort, which would encourage reconciliation and permanently strengthen it at all levels of society.

They invite the international community to give strong support to the struggle against all the manoeuvres which destabilize the African continent and persistently cause its conflicts.

They propose that African countries celebrate an annual Day of Reconciliation.

Proposition 6

The Non-Sacramental Form of Celebrating Reconciliation

The non-sacramental form of celebrating Penance should also be prudently favoured in such a way that it reveals the ecclesial character of penance and reconciliation. This would allow communities at a distance, without a priest, to live a real process of penance and reconciliation. It would allow Christians whose personal situation keeps them from the sacraments, to join in a penitential process in the Church. At the beginning of liturgical seasons like Advent and Lent, it can also serve, even for communities who have a priest, as a step towards the more fruitful reception of the sacrament (cf. “Reconciliatio et Poenitentia”, 37).

Proposition 7

Inculturating the Sacrament of Reconciliation

A great number of Christians in Africa adopt an ambiguous attitude towards the administration of reconciliation. While they are very scrupulous in carrying out the traditional rites of reconciliation, they give little value to the Sacrament of Penance.

Therefore, a serious and in-depth study should be done on the traditional African ceremonies of reconciliation, such as “palaver” (where a team of sages do public arbitration of cases), and arbitration of conflicts by a “team of mediators”. Similar bodies can be set up on Justice and Peace Commissions to assist Catholic faithful to seek conversion in a serious way through the celebration of the sacrament of Penance.

The grace of the Sacrament of Penance celebrated in faith suffices to reconcile us to God and neighbour, and does not require any traditional rituals of reconciliation.

Proposition 8

Pastoral Practices in Reconciliation

In order to enhance the development of the culture of reconciliation, local Churches may develop pastoral initiatives such as:

1. A Reconciliation Day or Week every year, especially in Advent and Lent, or a Year of Reconciliation on the continental level, to ask God for special pardon for all hurts and wounds inflicted upon each other and to reconcile offended persons and groups within the Church and the wider community. Communal acts of reconciliation and forgiveness could be arranged; and
2. an extraordinary Jubilee Year in which the Church in Africa and its Islands give thanks together with the universal Church and pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This period of reconciliation should be marked by the following:
 - a. personal conversion and individual sacramental confession and absolution;
 - b. a continental Eucharistic Congress;
 - c. the celebration of rites of reconciliation in which people forgive each other;

- d. renewal of Baptismal promises, in which being disciples of Jesus supersedes all other forms of allegiance to clan or political party; and
- e. a renewed Eucharistic life.

Proposition 9

The Spirituality of Reconciliation

“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting us the message of reconciliation...So we are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor 5:19,20).

Reconciliation involves a way of life (spirituality) and a mission. To implement a spirituality of reconciliation, justice and peace, the Church needs witnesses deeply rooted in Christ, nourished by his Word and by the sacraments. Thus, they may strive towards holiness, in virtue of an ongoing conversion and an intense prayer life, and give themselves to the work of reconciliation, justice and peace in the world, even to the point of martyrdom, after the example of Christ. Through their courage in the truth, their self-denial and their joy, they bear prophetic witness in a way of life which is in keeping with their faith. Mary, Mother of the Church-Family of God, who willingly welcomed the Word of God, listened to human needs and, with compassion, was a mediatrix, is to be their model.

The Synod Fathers recommend that:

- the memory of the great witnesses who gave their life in the service of the Gospel, who promoted the common good and defended the truth and human rights, be preserved and faithfully commemorated;
- Church members develop a sense of responsibility for their actions and an ongoing “metanoïa”, which can regularly be celebrated in the Sacrament of Reconciliation; and
- the celebration and adoration of the Eucharist, prayer and meditation on the Word of God, deeply establish the Church-Family of God in the Lord and give her the strength to be “salt of the earth” and “light of the world”.

Proposition 10

Ecumenical Dialogue

In service to reconciliation, justice and peace on the continent, and in union with the universal Church, the Church in Africa recommits herself to the task of ecumenical dialogue and cooperation. A divided Christianity remains a scandal, because it runs contrary to the wishes of the Divine Master, who wished and prayed that his followers may be one (cf. Jn 17:21). The goal of ecumenical dialogue is, therefore, both to bear witness to Christian fellowship in Christ and to move towards Christian unity with those with whom we share the same faith, through listening to the Word of God and collaborating in the service of their brothers and sisters “in one Lord one Baptism, one God and Father of all...” (Eph 4:5, 6). Accordingly, the Synod commends the ongoing efforts of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity to initiate and sustain dialogue with other Churches and ecclesial communities.

The Synod is aware that, although the unity of Christians is not yet a reality, Christians in various African countries have come together in various associations (such as the Christian Association of Nigeria, the Christian Council of Liberia, etc.) to undertake common works of charity and to safeguard the interest of Christians in a pluralistic modern state.

The synod commends these efforts and recommends them for other countries, where such associations could serve the cause of peace and reconciliation. In addition, the synod invites the Church in each diocese or region to ensure that the week devoted to prayer for Christian unity be marked by prayer and common activities that promote the unity of Christians, “that they may all be one” (Jn 17:21).

Proposition 11

Interreligious Dialogue

Peace in Africa and other parts of the world is very much determined by the relations among religions. Therefore, promoting the value of dialogue is important so that believers work together in associations dedicated to peace and justice, in a spirit of mutual trust and support, and families be taught the values of listening patiently and fearlessly respecting one another.

Dialogue with other religions, especially Islam and African Traditional Religion, is an integral part of the proclamation of the Gospel and the Church's pastoral activity on behalf of reconciliation and peace. Accordingly the initiative of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to establish dialogue with the different non-Christian religions is to be commended highly.

However, because religion is persistently politicized and becomes the cause of conflicts, religious dialogue is urgently needed with Islam and Traditional African Religion at all levels. This dialogue will be authentic and productive to the extent that each religion begins from the depths of its faith and encounters the other in truth and openness.

The Synod Fathers pray that religious intolerance and violence be minimized and eliminated through interreligious dialogue. The important ecumenical and interreligious event of Assisi (1986) provides us with a model to follow.

Proposition 12

Islam

With the Second Vatican Council, the Church-Family of God, "regards with esteem also the Moslems, who adore the one God, living and subsisting in himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men" ("Nostra Aetate", 3).

To serve reconciliation, justice and peace, every form of discrimination, intolerance and religious fundamentalism must be overcome. Where religious freedom is concerned, the right to worship must be stressed. In relations with Muslims, we must:

- give priority to a dialogue of life and a partnership in social matters and reconciliation;
- take into consideration the variety of situations and experiences;
- confront honestly our misunderstandings and difficulties;
- provide a better knowledge of Islam in the formation of priests, men and women religious and the lay faithful; and
- take initiatives which promote respect, friendship, collaboration and reciprocity.

Proposition 13

African Traditional Religion (ATR)

Since the Church-Family of God in Africa continues to live alongside adherents of African Traditional Religion, the Synod Fathers recalled the wise counsel of Vatican II ("Nostra aetate") which treats African Traditional Religion and other religions in the following way: "From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden force which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history" (2).

Knowledgeable people who are converts from African Traditional Religion can guide the Church to an ever greater and more precise knowledge of African cultures and religions, making the discernment of true points of opposition easier. This will help the necessary distinction to be made between the cultural and the religious and especially between the cultural and those malevolent programmes of sorcery, which cause the break-up and ruin of our families and our societies.

Therefore, with the Second Vatican Council, the Synod Fathers reject nothing that “is true and holy in these religions.... The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men” (2).

Therefore, this Synod proposes that:

-- African Traditional Religion and cultures be subject to qualified and thorough scientific research in the Catholic Universities of Africa and in the faculties of the Pontifical Universities in Rome in light of the Word of God;

-- Bishops in their diocese should take energetic pastoral action against all those involved in witchcraft and decide what disciplinary measures are required; and

-- each bishop should name an exorcist, wherever there is none.

As for what concerns witchcraft and cults,

-- the local Church is to rely on a balanced approach which studies this phenomenon in the light of the faith and reason, so as to liberate Africans from this scourge; and

-- a diocesan multi-disciplinary pastoral team is to devise a pastoral programme, that is grounded in rationality, deliverance and reconciliation.

B) Iustitia

Proposition 14

Justice

“The Church...bears witness to man, in the name of Christ, to his dignity and his vocation to the communion of persons. She teaches him the demands of justice and peace in conformity with divine wisdom” (“The Catechism of the Catholic Church”, 2419). In the present state of human sinfulness and wounded hearts, however, the Old Testament is strong in its outlook that Justice cannot come to a human person through his own strength, but it is a gift of God. The New Testament develops this outlook more fully, making Justice the supreme revelation of the salvific grace of God. Thus, Justice is first and foremost a gift of God. It is God who justifies us through Christ. This means that it is God who makes the sinner worthy of the relationship of communion and covenant with God and empowers him or her to render justice (Cf. “Relatio post disceptationem”).

Indeed, the fruit of reconciliation between God and humanity, and within the human family itself, is the restoration of justice and the just demands of relationships. This is because God justifies the sinner by overlooking his or her sins, or one justifies an offender by pardoning his or her faults. And because God has justified us by forgiving our sins, so as to reconcile us to himself, we too can work out just relationships and structures among ourselves and in our societies, through pardoning and overlooking peoples’ faults out of love and mercy. How else can we live in community and communion?

Accordingly, gathered in Synod, the Bishops of the Church-Family of God in Africa, in the company of Priests, Deacons, Religious and Lay Faithful, commit themselves:

-- to seeking in prayer the Justice/Justification of God, in whose light we are enabled to justify and pardon others in love and mercy; and

-- to being architects of just structures in our societies, in the light of the Justice which comes from God.

Proposition 15

Security in Society

The Synod calls upon all members of the Church in Africa to promote justice for everyone and respect for human rights through civic education and by building up a culture of justice and peace. To accomplish this, Dioceses and Parishes should establish Commissions for Justice and Peace, in collaboration with local community leaders, who may act as intermediaries.

The current mobilization of African countries for the reduction of poverty and the pursuit of lasting peace open great hopes. That is why the Synod recommends, for the sake of justice, the common good and the welfare of peoples. The Synod appeals to governments to offer security in society and the basic needs of life to the most vulnerable from a just distribution of the fruits of development.

This Synod reminds our African governments of this fact and appeals to them for security of life and property. Life is sacred and must be protected and secured. Governments should put in place a machinery to stop killings, kidnapping, etc., on the continent. Insecurity of life and property and a lack of good order increases migration and the brain drain and, this, in turn, adds to poverty.

Proposition 16

The Brain Drain

African countries and families invest great sums of money training professionals to contribute to improving the conditions of life of their people. Unfortunately, many of them leave soon after graduation in the hope of finding better working conditions and remuneration.

The Synod proposes:

- that African countries take urgent steps to improve the conditions of life and work on the continent to forestall the "brain drain" in order to prevent people from leaving and being absorbed by developing countries;
- that professionals exercise a sense of sacrifice and service to their people, at whose expense they have been trained; and
- that developed countries support Africa in addressing this issue by helping to create centres of academic excellence which meet the needs of the integral development of societies.

Proposition 17

Social Justice and the Eradication of Poverty

The Synod Fathers have pleaded for an economy in service to the poor and strongly denounced an unjust economic order which has led to the perpetuation of poverty.

We therefore propose that:

1. the Church-Family of God in Africa recommits herself to the service of the poor, orphans and marginalized in imitation of life in the early days of the Church;
2. As in the case of the early Church, the Church in Africa and its Islands must develop an internal system for taking care of their needs. With regard to emergency situations (catastrophic disasters), it is imperative to develop relationships of solidarity between the different dioceses and within the episcopal conferences themselves. For this reason, there is an urgent need to establish a solidarity fund on the continental level through the CARITAS network. At the same time, the Church should endeavour to promote and inculcate a holistic perception of work as an expression of grace and solidarity. In this way, human talent will be acknowledged and employed as needed for the good of all.
3. leaders take adequate measures (access to land, access to water, infrastructures, etc.), to remedy poverty and to develop policies to ensure self-sufficiency in food production and educational programmes which are production-oriented;

4. the further cancellation of debts with favourable conditions be advocated and the elimination of the practice of usury;
- 5 African governments be more prudent in accessing grants and loans so that they do not push their people into further debt. The poor and marginalised be empowered through initiatives such as micro-finance, agrarian and similar programmes as the Church's concrete sign of solidarity with the poor and marginalized;
6. Africa be actively involved as an important stakeholder in decision-making processes on international trade and socio-economic issues which affect her; and
7. the above-mentioned efforts be inspired and governed by the promotion of integral human development and authentic human values.

Proposition 18

Social Doctrine of the Church

The evangelizing mission of the Church-Family of God in Africa draws on several resource materials, prominent and foremost among which is the Scripture, the Word of God. But, as observed at the Synod ("Relatio ante disceptationem", p. 6), the conduct and character of the Church's ministry are enhanced by several "support events and material", "subsidia fidei", such as "The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church", a very comprehensive guide on the Church's mission and self-expression in the world and its social order as "teacher" and "leaven".

Accordingly the Synod Fathers, recognizing the usefulness of "The Compendium" in the task of evangelization on the continent and its Islands, propose that every National and Regional Episcopal Conference:

- revise all catechetical materials at every level (children, youth, young couples, families) to include elements of the Church's Social Doctrine and translate "The Compendium" into local languages;
- require that the Church's Social Doctrine be made mandatory in all seminary training and ongoing formation programmes for priests and men and women religious and in the formation and activities of the laity in service to the Church and society;
- gather in collections, where they do not yet exist, the messages and pastoral letters from their own social teaching;
- establish a team of researchers to draw a syllabus for teaching and communicating social and Christian values and the syllabus, thus devised, be taught from the primary to the university level); and
- make the Gospel and African values of solidarity, generosity and common good, both known and loved.

Proposition 19

Education

The Synod Fathers voiced a concern for education, an idea which is often expressed by the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI. As in other places throughout the world, Africa is experiencing a crisis in education. A complete, integrated programme of education is needed, intimately uniting both faith and reason, through which the faithful are prepared adequately to face all circumstances in life and avoid attempting to guide themselves by dualistic and relativistic criteria in their everyday choices. Education cannot be reduced to academics only, but should instill in youth the profound meaning of life. The family should be recognized as the prime place for education and, therefore, assisted in this mission. The Synod Fathers therefore insist on the priority of education and defend the right of citizens to education work, which cannot and should not be a monopoly of the State.

Where Churches have established schools, intending to partner with the State to provide education, it is necessary that the right of Churches to run the Schools be respected. It would also be desirable if the State expressed its partnership with the Church in education by giving support to the Schools.

Proposition 20

Maputo Protocol

The Synod Fathers acknowledged the problematic effects of the Maputo Protocol on women and life, for example, regarding women's reproductive health. However, above all, they hold unacceptable the promotion of abortion in article 14/2/c: "Protect the reproductive rights of women by authorizing medical abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother or the foetus."

According to the Church's teaching, abortion is contrary to God's will. Furthermore, this article is in contradiction with human rights and the right to life. It trivializes the seriousness of the crime of abortion and devalues the role of childbearing. The Church condemns this position on abortion and proclaims that the value and dignity of human life be protected from the moment of conception to natural death.

The Synod Fathers call on the Church in Africa and its Islands to commit herself to employ the necessary means and structures to help and accompany women and couples tempted by abortion. Moreover, they praise the courage of governments in their legislation which fights abortion.

C) Pax

Proposition 21

Peace

Peace is primarily a gift of God and then the fruit of our efforts. That is why peace should begin in the hearts of people as a grace given (cf. Jn 14:1). "My peace I give to you," says Jesus (Jn 14:27). As peace is a universal good, depending on respect for everyone's human rights and all creation, we should dedicate all of our energies to its service.

The Synod therefore proposes that:

- an African Peace and Solidarity Initiative be established to intervene in an act of solidarity and assist the local Church in conflict resolution and peace-building throughout the continent with its wise counsel on justice, peace and reconciliation. This initiative will draw on those within our Church who have experience, integrity and the respect of others. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace would be asked to liaise with SECAM to promote this initiative;
- Diocesan, National and Regional Peace-Building Councils be set up within the Justice and Peace Commission, with a counterpart on the continental level, established to liaise with the "African Peace and Solidarity Initiative" at SECAM;
- these Peace-Building Councils should be well resourced with personnel and material to train the clergy and laity in the practice of peace-building, dialogue and mediation;
- Justice and Peace Commissions, at the national and regional level, set up a monitoring desk for the prevention and resolution of conflicts;
- small groups and programmes of formation be developed which are suitable for each level (primary, secondary, college and university) to impart a real culture of peace;
- seminary formators follow a course which would include peace studies and conflict resolution;
- a permanent organization for inter-ethnic dialogue be established for the sake of a lasting peace;
- prayer for peace and elections.

Proposition 22

Environmental Protection and Reconciliation with Creation

Our Christian faith teaches that God the Creator made all things good (cf. Gn 1); and gave the earth to us humans to cultivate and take care of as stewards (cf. Gn 2:15). We observe that many human beings, at all levels, have continued to abuse nature and destroy God's beautiful world by exploitation of natural resources beyond what is sustainable and useful. There is an irresponsible degradation and senseless destruction of the earth, which is "our mother".

In complicity with those who exercise political and economic leadership in Africa, some businesses, governments and multinational and transnational companies engage in business that pollute the environment, destroy flora and fauna, thus causing unprecedented erosion and desertification of large areas of arable land. All of these threaten the survival of mankind and the entire eco-system. This has raised among scientists and stakeholders the awareness of the deleterious effects of climate change, global warming, natural calamities (like earthquakes, sea-quakes and their consequences like tsunami).

To make the earth habitable beyond the present generation and to guarantee sustainable and responsible care of the earth, we call upon the particular Churches to:

- promote environmental education and awareness;
- persuade their local and national governments to adopt policies and binding legal regulations for the protection of the environment and promote alternative and renewable sources of energy; and
- encourage all to plant trees and treat nature and its resources, respecting the common good and the integrity of nature, with transparency and respect for human dignity.

Proposition 23

Arms' Trade

Because of the prevalence of armaments and land mines on the Continent and its Islands, the Church in Africa, gathered in Synod, associates itself with the Holy See and gladly welcomes UN initiatives, African Union and regional intergovernmental organizations like ECOWAS - Small-Arms Embargo, to stop illegal arms-trafficking and to make transparent all legal trading in arms. The Synod recommends that the Pontifical Council "Justice and Peace" update its document on the arms' trade.

The Synod Fathers encourage national governments to support the on-going study and preparation of an Arms' Trade Treaty (ATT) within the UN, with binding universal standards for the global commerce of conventional weapons, which would respect human rights and humanitarian international law.

The Synod Fathers, making their own the call of the prophet Isaiah, for love of God and neighbour, "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks" (Is 2:4), propose that the design and production of all kinds of arms be drastically reduced for the sake of education and agricultural development which respects the environment.

Moreover, the Synod Fathers absolutely condemn the production of nuclear arms, biological arms, anti-personnel and every sort of weapons of mass destruction. They demand that these be banned from the face of the earth.

The Episcopal Conferences in arms-producing countries are encouraged to advocate that their governments pass legislation restraining the production and distribution of arms to the detriment of African peoples and nations.

Proposition 24

Good Governance

The common good should find legal expression in the Constitution and requires the exercise of good governance. Its practice also needs to respect the principles of democracy: equality among persons, the sovereignty of peoples and respect for the rule of law. Otherwise, democracy loses its vitality and dies.

The Synod Fathers therefore call on leaders conscientiously to exercise stewardship and to uphold the common good over the interests of family, clan, ethnic group or political party and to protect and promote the social, economic, political and religious rights of every citizen, as enshrined in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the African Charter of Human and People's Rights.

The Synod Fathers urge Episcopal Conferences at all levels to establish advocacy bodies to lobby members of parliament, governments and international institutions, so that the Church can contribute effectively to the formulation of just laws and policies for the people's good.

To fully exercise her role and contribute to a culture of peace and human rights, the Church in Africa requests to be present in the national, regional and continental institutions in Africa (AU). The Synod urges Episcopal Conferences to support the NEPAD - Peer Review Mechanism within the African Union. The Synod also urges African countries to submit themselves for the Peer Review Mechanism.

Proposition 25

Politics

The Synod Fathers welcome positive developments in the political and socio-economic sphere in those African countries which are governed according to their constitution and where human rights, justice and peace are upheld. The Synod Fathers value the increasing maturity of civil society which, in certain countries, is gradually taking shape and influencing decisions about the Nation's future. They compliment and encourage those politicians who are clearly devoted to the service of their people.

However, the Synod also noted the sad fact that in many countries in Africa, there are rampant violations of human rights, injustices, corruption and impunity, which fuel coup d'état, violent conflicts and wars. In these places, the principles of democracy are torn up at their very roots equality among human beings, sovereignty of the people and universal respect for the rule of law.

In these cases, the democratic process is increasingly spiralling downwards, a situation which ultimately compromises the peace, development and stability of Nations. Anti-democratic systems, such as despotism, one-party rule and military governments are expanding and governing their States as if they were a prize of war. These countries find themselves in debt, ravaged and over-exploited.

In such circumstances, the Church's mission is to promote a culture of respect for the rule of law and the rights of all. Therefore, the Synod Fathers call upon all Pastors to offer present and future leaders in political and economic life a fitting doctrinal, pastoral and practical formation as well as spiritual support (by setting up chaplaincies). They request Catholic universities to establish faculties of political science. Catholic Social Teaching is a valuable means which should be spread as much as possible.

We call upon all Episcopal Conferences to promote multidimensional programmes of civic education; implement programmes to foster the formation of a social conscience at all levels; and encourage competent and honest citizens to participate in party politics.

Proposition 26

Elections

Citizens by their vote freely express their political choice. Thus, democratic elections represent the mark of legitimacy for the exercise of power in Africa. Failure to respect a national Constitution, the law or the results of free, fair and transparent elections, therefore, is unacceptable under any circumstances.

Accordingly, the Synod Fathers call upon the local Churches to educate the candidates at various times of voting to respect, the principles of fair elections (electoral transparency, respect for one's political opponents, the Constitution, the ballot and the impartiality of the various observers as well as accepting legitimate defeat), and to contribute through Justice and Peace Commissions to monitoring elections, so that they be free, fair, transparent and secure for us. While encouraging all Christians to take part in political life, the Church in its prophetic mission will continue to speak out against electoral abuses and all forms of cheating in the conduct of elections.

Religious leaders are called upon to maintain impartiality and, in no case take a partisan position. They are to be a discerning, objective and realistic voice for the voiceless, without compromising their impartiality.

Proposition 27

Religious Liberty

Religious liberty (which presupposes the possibility of professing one's faith both privately and publically) and the freedom of each person's search of God as Creator and Saviour are fundamental human rights.

Consequently, the Synod Fathers urge that all countries in Africa recognize and protect religious liberty and freedom of worship and that all forms of intolerance, persecution and religious fundamentalism might be eliminated. They also ask for the restitution of Churches, Church property and the property of other religious institutions, confiscated by some countries.

Proposition 28

Migrants and Refugees

On the African continent there are about 15 million migrants who are looking for a homeland and a place of peace. The phenomenon of this exodus reveals the face of socio-political injustices and crises in some areas of Africa. Thousands have tried, and are still trying, to cross deserts and seas to reach "greener pastures", where they believe they will receive a better education, earn more money and, in some cases, enjoy greater freedom. Unfortunately, this phenomenon afflicts many countries of the continent. Even now, many of the refugees are languishing in prisons; hundreds have already died.

This precarious situation for so many foreigners ought to win the solidarity of everyone; instead it causes much fear and anxiety. Many consider immigrants a burden, view them with suspicion and indeed consider them a danger and a threat. This often gives rise to expressions of intolerance, xenophobia and racism.

Among some recent worrisome developments are: legislation which penalizes all clandestine entries into foreign countries and consulates and the border police discriminating against travellers from Africa in airports.

Indeed, migration within and outside the continent is a multi-dimensional drama, which affects all countries, causing destabilization, the destruction of families and a waste of Africa's human capital.

The Synod Fathers believe, first of all, that the principle of the universal destination of created goods and the Church's teachings on human rights, freedom of movement and the rights of migrant workers are increasingly violated by the world's restrictive migration policies and laws against Africans.

Therefore, the Synod is convinced that it is necessary and urgent to:

- demand that the government apply international migratory law evenly and fairly without discriminating against African travellers;
- provide special pastoral care for the vulnerable segments of Africa's population in a joint-effort between the Churches-of-origin and host-Churches to extend pastoral care to migrants;
- advocate for a just treatment of refugees in cooperation with the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, the International Catholic Migration Commission and Justice and Peace Commissions at all levels of the Church;

- establish offices or “Commissions” for the Movement of People in the secretariats of Episcopal Conferences, charged with the task of working together and with Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant Peoples;
- develop programmes of pastoral care for migrants and their families.

The Synod also calls on African Governments to create a climate of security and freedom, to implement programmes of development and job creation, to dissuade their citizens from leaving home and becoming refugees, and to undertake initiatives encouraging refugees to return with a programme to welcome them.

Proposition 29

Natural Resources

The earth is a precious gift of God to humanity. The Synod Fathers gave thanks to God for the abundant riches and natural resources of Africa.

But they also stated that the peoples of Africa, instead of enjoying them as a blessing and a source of real development, are victims of bad public-management by local authorities and exploitation by foreign powers.

A strict connection exists today between the exploitation of natural resources, the trafficking of arms and a contrived insecurity.

Some Multinational corporations exploit the natural resources of African countries oftentimes without concern for populations or respect for the environment, with the complicity of many privileged local people.

The Synod Fathers condemn the culture of consumerism which is wasteful, and advocate the culture of moderation. The Synod appeals to the international community to encourage the formulation of national and international legislation for the just distribution of revenue generated by natural resources for the benefit of local populations and to ensure their legal management to the advantage of countries possessing these resources, while barring, at the same time, illegal exploitation. The Synod also proposes to address the global economic system, which continues to marginalize Africa. We highly recommend to the Church Family of God in Africa to press our governments to adopt a suitable juridic framework which takes into account the interests of our countries and their populations.

We ask Church institutions which are active in these societies to press for allowing populations to enjoy the management of their natural resources.

For her part, the Church will seek to establish a desk in various countries of the continent to monitor the management of natural resources.

Proposition 30

Land and Water

Since large stretches of fertile land and water resources are unscrupulously exploited by foreign and local investors in many African countries, causing the displacement and dispossession of poor persons and their communities, who are often powerless to oppose this “assault”, this Synod urgently calls upon all governments to ensure that its citizens are protected from the unjust alienation of their land and access to water, which are essential goods of the human person.

The Synod Fathers urge that:

- the Church in Africa seek information and learn about land and water issues in local churches in order to educate the People of God and enable them to challenge unjust decisions in these matters;
- all negotiations on land deals be conducted in full transparency and with the participation of the local communities who may be affected;
- land alienation deals should not be contracted out nor signed without the free, prior and informed consent of the local communities concerned, nor should people forfeit their land without proper compensation;

- agricultural workers be guaranteed a fair wage in light of the fact that investments promote the creation of employment;
- promote the professional formation of youth in farming and the raising of animals as a way to stem the uncontrolled flight from the village to the cities;
- the models of agricultural production respect the environment and not contribute to climate change, soil depletion and the exhaustion of drinkable water reserves;
- food production for export not endanger food security and sovereignty the needs of future generations;
- traditional land rights be respected and recognized by the law; and
- water not be exploited as a private economic commodity without due attention to people's interests.

Proposition 31

Globalization and International Aid

The Church in Africa should be aware of the ambiguity of globalization and its consequences. She must be ready to respond to the challenges that globalization entails and confront them responsibly. The best globalization must be a globalization of solidarity.

This globalization sometimes takes the form of international aid from international agencies. Unfortunately, such aid does not always reach the people for whom it is intended and, at times, it comes with conditions which do not reflect the needs of the people.

The Synod Fathers call upon African governments and intermediate agencies to a more responsible and transparent management of this international solidarity for the sake of the common good. The Synod Fathers insist that these values should be appreciated and that the local Churches be recognized as partners in development.

Proposition 32

Respect for Ethnic Diversity

The Church, as servant of reconciliation, has the mission of reconciling all things in Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:19). In carrying out this mission, the Church acknowledges and respects the rich ethnic, cultural, political and religious diversities of the African peoples by seeking a unity in diversity, rather than in uniformity, by emphasizing what unifies, rather than what divides them and by tapping the positive values of these diversities as a source of strength to forge social harmony, peace and progress.

Proposition 33

Inculturation

A thorough study needs to be made of African traditions and cultures in the light of the Gospel, so as to enrich Christian life, to set aside any aspects which are contrary to Christian teaching and to animate and sustain the work of evangelizing the peoples of Africa and their cultures.

The Church in Africa is seeing a steady growth in the number of her members and those serving within the clergy. Nevertheless, an inconsistency exists between some traditional African cultural practices and the demands of the Gospel.

To be relevant and credible, the Church needs to make an in-depth discernment, so as to identify those aspects of culture which promote and those which hinder the inculturation of Gospel values.

Therefore, the Synod proposes that:

- positive cultural values be promoted and inculcated in all its institutions of learning and training;

- the work of authentic African theologians be encouraged and promoted;
- positive elements of African traditional cultures be incorporated into the Church's rites;
- pastoral agents learn the local languages and cultures, so that Gospel values can touch people's hearts and help them towards a genuine reconciliation which leads to lasting peace;
- the documents of the Magisterium be translated into local languages;
- the exchange of documents between Episcopal Conferences be facilitated;
- canonical and liturgical regulations regarding the ministry of exorcism be used in a ministry of compassion, justice and charity; and
- simony be denounced among a certain number of priests, who abuse the sacramentals in order to meet the demands of the faithful who are fond of religious symbols, like incense, holy water, olive oil, salt, candles, etc.

The teaching of culture conditions the integral development of individuals and groups. Therefore, Africans should promote the cultural heritage of their region. They should cherish certain values and, at the same time, open them to an encounter with other cultures values such as respect for elders and for women as mothers; respect for solidarity, mutual aid and hospitality; unity; respect for life; and honesty, truth and the word of honour.

III - PROMOTORES

A) Ecclesia

Proposition 34

Evangelization

The Synod Fathers highlight the urgency and necessity of evangelization which is the mission and, indeed, the very identity of the Church ("Evangelii nuntiandi", 14).

The Synod Fathers emphasize that this evangelization essentially consists in bearing witness to Christ in the power of the Spirit through life and then by word ("Evangelii nuntiandi", 21), in a spirit of openness to others, respect and dialogue with them, concerning Gospel values.

This synod calls upon the Church-Family of God in Africa to be a witness in service to reconciliation, justice and peace, as "salt of the earth" and "light of the world."

Proposition 35

Small Christian Communities (SCC)

The Synod renews its support for the promotion of Small Christian Communities (SCC), which firmly build up the Church-Family of God in Africa. The SCC are based on Gospel-sharing, where Christians gather to celebrate the presence of the Lord in their lives and in their midst, through the celebration of the Eucharist, the reading of the Word of God and witnessing to their faith in loving service to each other and their communities. Under the guidance of their pastors and catechists, they seek to deepen their faith and mature in Christian witness, as they live concrete experiences of fatherhood, motherhood, relationships, open fellowship, where each takes care of the other. This Family of God extends beyond the bonds of blood, ethnicity, tribe, culture and race. In this way, SCC open paths to reconciliation with extended families, which have the tendency to impose on Christian nuclear families their syncretistic ways and customs.

Proposition 36

The Challenges Posed by the New Religious Movements

In light of the challenges posed by the new religious movements (cults, esoteric movements, etc.) local Churches are required to devise forms of evangelisation which best meet the existing problems of the faithful.

Parishes are to promote in their Small Christian Communities a fraternal life of solidarity. Agents in apostolic activity are also to develop a ministry of spiritual listening and support to assist the faithful to live each day in keeping with their faith.

Furthermore, the Synod recommends that catechesis lead to a genuine experience of conversion and include formation for perseverance in the faith in time of trials (cf. Rm 5:3-5), in the same manner that traditional initiation prepares young people to encounter any and every situation, deep Scriptural and doctrinal teachings of the Church should be transmitted to the faithful. Prayer groups, Church movements and new communities should also make this concern a part of their programmes.

Proposition 37

The Laity

Christ's lay faithful share in the threefold mission of Christ, priest, prophet and king, because they are members of the People of God. They are therefore called to live their vocation and mission at all levels of society, especially in the socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural spheres. In this way, they become the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world", as they serve reconciliation, justice and peace in the these spheres of society.

Consequently, the Church must provide them with an initial and ongoing catechesis for a conversion of heart, supported by an adequate spiritual, biblical, doctrinal and moral formation for a social Christian conscience.

In this regard, perhaps one of the providential tools for the development of this conversion and faith experience are the new ecclesial movements. These movements and communities of faith and communion exist in the Church as "veritable laboratories of faith", places of formation and empowerment through the Spirit for a life of witness and mission. Thus equipped as disciples of the Lord, they act in the world as leaven.

For those who are engaged in directing political, economic and cultural affairs, the Church is to take special care to plan a formation programme based on the Word of God and the social doctrine of the Church (cf. "The Compendium", 12). This program is to include formation in leadership which transforms life through action (leadership training for transformative action).

At the same time, the Church is to encourage the formation of lay associations and fellowships in the different professional fields (medical, juridical, parliamentary, academic, etc.) to assist them in their apostolic activity in society and the Church. She is to further strengthen existing Councils of the Laity and support them at all levels by providing chaplains for them.

Small Christian Communities are to offer assistance in the formation of the People of God and serve as a place for concretely living out reconciliation, justice and peace.

Proposition 38

The Family

As an institution, the family has a divine origin. It is the "sanctuary of life" and the nucleus of society and the Church. It is the proper place for learning and practicing the culture of pardon, peace, reconciliation and harmony.

Because of its capital importance and the threats this institution faces, notably, the trivialization of abortion, the devaluation of maternity (child-bearing), the distortion of the notion of marriage and the family itself, the ideology of divorce and a new relativist ethic, the family and human life need to be protected and defended.

The Synod Fathers call upon the local Churches to adopt the following measures:

- make the Holy See's Charter of the Family known;- adequate catechesis on the Christian understanding of the family;
- concrete, integral pastoral programmes which promote a life of prayer and listening to the Word of God ("lectio divina") in families;
- education of couples to grow in conjugal love and responsible parenthood, according to the doctrine of the Church;
- offer pastoral support to parents in their responsibilities as first educators;
- spiritual accompaniment for couples (for instance, through the Notre Dame Team, the Cana Fraternity, etc.);
- consider the service of Christian spouses as a ministry and make of this dignity the foundation of the family;
- help the spouses to live their ministry as a ministry of prayer, evangelization, charity and life;
- celebration of jubilees (silver, golden) of marriage with the awarding of certificates of honour;
- support of young couples by well-identified model couples;
- provisions for marriage counselling and institutes for the family;
- education and formation in marriage and family values through the media (radio, television, etc.); and
- creation of diocesan and national associations of families, supported, on the continental level.

Proposition 39

Priests

Every priest configured by ordination to Christ, the Head and Good Shepherd, is called to be a living sign of Jesus Christ, who came to serve and not to be served (Mk 10:45).

Consequently, priests must cultivate a profound spiritual life that involves listening to the Word of God, celebrating the Eucharist, and fidelity to prayer, especially the Hours. They must resolutely commit themselves to an evangelical and a fraternal community life, shielded from family pressures, a modest life of discipline and self-denial ("Apostolica vivendi forma") and a special love for the poor. They are to be examples of responsible stewardship, of accountability and transparency. They should imitate the courageous prophets in the face of social ills. Thereby they become "salt of the earth" and "light of the world".

The priestly vocation also includes a commitment to the Gospel virtues of poverty, chastity, and obedience. These are their greatest profession of love for Christ, for his Church and for their neighbour. Accordingly, The Synod Fathers urge all priests of the Latin Rite to live their celibacy generously and with love.

According to the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, (no. 29), "Celibacy must be accepted . . . as an inestimable gift of God, as a stimulus for pastoral charity, as participation in the fatherhood of God and in the fecundity of the Church, as witness of the kingdom for the world".

In addition, this grace period of the Year of Priests invites all priests to imitate the zeal of St. John Vianney for the ministry of the Sacrament of Penance.

In view of this and because of the ministries which priests exercise in the Christ and for Christ's Faithful, sometimes in very difficult circumstances, the Synod Fathers do not cease to thank God for them and to lift them up in prayer to God for his help. But the Synod Fathers also wish to assure their priests a solid and ongoing formation in the pertinent areas of their life and ministry. They commend to them, for their sustenance and spiritual growth:

- annual and monthly days of recollection
- regular prayer life and reading of Scriptures
- ongoing formation, especially for young priests who need to be lovingly accompanied, and which should include the Social Doctrine of the Church; and
- overall security and the means of an honourable life for sick and aged priests.

Furthermore, for priests who work outside their dioceses, the Synod specifies that an agreement (or contract) be reached between the diocese of origin and the welcoming diocese, clearly defining the conditions of life and work and the duration of the mission. In addition, these priests must be considered as fully pastors in all justice and Christian charity and with full membership in the presbyterate.

Proposition 40

Seminarians

A holistic approach is needed in the formation of seminarians preparing for the Catholic priesthood. While the importance of a solid intellectual, moral, spiritual and pastoral formation must be upheld, the human and psychological growth of each candidate should be included as a foundation for the development of an authentic priestly life. The formators are to ensure the spiritual renewal of seminarians who should not conform to ethnic and cultural limitations (cf. Rom 12), but on the contrary become that “new being in Christ” (2 Cor 5:17).

In this way, our future priests can become more firmly grounded in the understanding of their cultures and Gospel virtues and strengthened in their commitment and loyalty to the person of Christ and the Church’s mission of reconciliation, justice and peace.

The academic staff of the seminary and the special formation team are to work together in order to facilitate this integral formation. The seminarians should be formed for community life in such a way that fraternal life among them will, in the future, guarantee a true experience of priesthood as a “close priestly fraternity”.

In the selection and formation of candidates, the bishop and the team of formators are to discern carefully the motivation and aptitude of the seminarians, in order to ensure that those who are eventually ordained priests will be true disciples of Christ and servants of the Church.

Proposition 41

Permanent Deacons

This Synod has identified the service of Reconciliation justice and peace as the urgent face and form of the apostolic mission of the Church-Family of God in Africa and its Islands. In so doing, this Synod has also described several agents of this apostolic mission of the Church, including various components of the laity, but including also ordained ministers, among whom permanent deacons, who “serve reconciliation, justice and peace” as dedicated ministers of God, his merciful love and his Word.

“Strengthened by sacramental grace...they serve in the diaconate of the liturgy, of the word and of charity to the people of God” (“Lumen gentium”, 29).

Therefore, this Synod recommends that these servants of the Lord receive an adequate formation, especially in the sacred sciences and the social doctrine of the Church. Since the aim of all spiritual exercises is the discovery of a better way of service, the Synod Fathers call upon deacons to seek and contemplate the face of the Lord daily, so that they might discover a more credible way of serving reconciliation, justice and peace.

Proposition 42

Consecrated Life

The Church acknowledges the inestimable value of the Consecrated Life, a particular form of the discipleship of Christ, which plays a fundamental role in the life and mission of the Church at the service of God’s reign.

The Church particularly values the witness of consecrated persons in prayer life and community life, education, health, human promotion and pastoral service.

The prophetic role of consecrated persons must be emphasized in the process of reconciliation, justice and peace, and the fact that they are often very near to victims of oppression, repression, discrimination, violence and sufferings of all kinds. In closely collaborating with the clergy in pastoral ministry, the dignity of women

in consecrated life and their religious identity and charism are to be protected and promoted. Bishops are to assist young religious congregations towards self-reliance.

The Church expects much from the witness of religious communities, characterized by racial, regional and ethnic diversity. By their life in common they proclaim that God makes no distinctions between persons and that we are all his children, members of the same family, living in harmony in diversity and peace.

To support and encourage consecrated persons, the Synod Fathers recommend that:

- a careful discernment of candidates (brothers, sisters and priests) be done in the course of their formation;
- they be given a solid human, spiritual, intellectual (biblical, theological, moral) and professional formation;
- they remain faithful to their vocation and charism; and
- their initial formation (postulancy and novitiate) normally be done in Africa.

The Synod welcomes the establishment of The Confederation of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (COMSAM), which is a structure of support for the Consecrated Life in Africa and a forum for dialogue with the Bishops of the continent (SECAM).

Proposition 43

Catechesis

The teaching of catechism has become the normal way of introducing people to the faith and of initiating them into the Church through Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation. It is also the way in which people are prepared to receive the other sacraments. Therefore, it is important that the memorised catechism be vitally linked with living the catechism so as to lead to an intense, permanent conversion in life. The Synod Fathers urge that particular attention be paid to initiation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The challenge is to form people for an adult Christian life, so that they can face the difficulties of their social, political, economic and cultural life.

In catechesis, adequate use should be made of The Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Proposition 44

Catechists

Permanent catechists or those who act as catechists on occasion are the vital heralds of the Gospel for our Small Christian Communities, where they exercise various roles: leaders of prayer, counsellors and mediators. They require a solid formation and material support which is necessary for them effectively to assume their role as spiritual guides. They also need to be encouraged and supported in their zeal for service within these communities, especially their service to reconciliation, justice and peace.

Volunteer catechists should also be given adequate formation, supported in their training and equipped with teaching aids.

B) In Christo roborati

Proposition 45

Eucharistic Source of Communion and Reconciliation

At the beginning of the third millennium of Christianity, our big challenge does not consist in highlighting differences in origins or culture, but in building up a unity which respects diversity. Men and women of different origins, characters, cultures and religions of origin can together build up unity to a high degree, a unity to the point of laying down one's life for and with one another for the same person, namely, the God-made-Man, Jesus Christ, who lived among us, shed his Blood for us in the greatest of solidarity and gives us himself as Food in our daily lives. This Blood of Christ shed for us is the bond and foundation of a new fellowship which opposes every hint of tribalism, racism, ethnicity, nepotism, fetishism, etc.

The Synod expressed strong disapproval of certain deviations in sacramental practice which run counter to the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.

Let us insist that the Eucharist remain the source and summit of reconciliation and the entire Christian life and that holiness is the most effective way of building up a society of reconciliation, justice and peace.

Let us watch carefully the celebration of the Eucharist and arrange times and places for Eucharistic Adoration (individual and communal) in all dioceses and parishes. Care should be taken that Churches and chapels be ordinarily reserved for the celebration of the Eucharist, avoiding as much as possible that they become merely social spaces. The Synod Fathers ask that aid organizations be willing to support Dioceses, in sincere dialogue with local bishops, in the construction of places of worship, recognizing that these are essential for the visibility of the Church, a guarantee of a sense of the holy and of authentic and integral human development.

Proposition 46

The Power of the Word of God

“Ignorance of Scriptures is ignorance of Christ” (St. Jerome). The Synod on the Bishops, in the spirit of the Gospel, reminded Bishops, priests and deacons of their essential ministry as preachers of the Gospel to the Church-Family of God and the world. Reading and meditating on the Word of God grounds us more profoundly in Christ and guides our ministry as servants to reconciliation, justice and peace.

Therefore, this Synod recommends that the Biblical Apostolate be promoted in every Christian community, the family and ecclesial movements. The Synod also recommends that all of Christ’s faithful adopt the practice of reading the Bible each day.

C) Ecclesia agens

Proposition 47

Women in Africa

Women in Africa make a great contribution to the family, society and the Church with their many talents and resources. However, not only are their dignity and contributions not fully recognized and appreciated, but are often deprived of their rights. In spite of the significant advances made in the education and development of women in some countries in Africa, the development of girls and women is often disproportionate to that of boys and men; girls and women are generally unjustly treated.

The Synod Fathers condemn all acts of violence against women, e.g. the battering of wives, the disinheritance of daughters, the oppression of widows in the name of tradition, forced marriages, female genital mutilation, trafficking in women and several other abuses such as sex slavery and sex tourism. All other inhumane and unjust acts against women are equally condemned.

The Synod Fathers propose:

- the integral human formation of girls and women (intellectual, professional, moral, spiritual, theological, etc.);
- the creation of “shelters” for abused girls and women to find refuge and receive counselling;
- the close collaboration among episcopal conferences to stop the trafficking of women;
- the greater integration of women into Church structures and decision-making processes;
- the setting up of commissions on the Diocesan and national levels to address women’s issues, to help them better carry out their mission in the Church and society; and
- the setting up of a study commission on women in the Church within the Pontifical Council for the Family.

Proposition 48

Youth

In Africa today, youth constitute the majority of the population, and are a gift and treasure from God, for which all Africa is grateful. They ought to be loved, valued and respected. Furthermore, youth are the strength and hope of the Church and society. In many countries of Africa, youth are faced with many problems and challenges, making them particularly vulnerable due to an inadequate personal formation and education, unemployment, political exploitation, drug abuse, etc. Such situations leave youth feeling frustrated and rejected.

The Synod Fathers are deeply concerned about the plight of youth and recommend as follows:

- provide resources and centres to teach professional skills and human formation of youth by the local Church in collaboration with various other institutions;
- supply career counseling, entrepreneurial training and the creation of jobs for youth;
- give youth an ongoing catechetical-biblical formation to educate them to be agents of reconciliation, justice and peace among themselves and to have a proper critical spirit concerning mass media issues;
- undertake a study by diocesan and parish youth commissions of the problems and challenges facing youth;
- organize diocesan, national, regional and continental youth commissions;
- institute trauma and rehabilitation centres for traumatized youth (child-soldiers, abused young people, those suffering from drug-dependency, etc.); and
- national education systems be more open to less-gifted persons, so as to provide opportunities for all.

Proposition 49

Children

Children, God's gift to humanity, should receive very special care from their families, the Church, society and governments. Children are bearers of newness of life: in their milieu, they are apostles and are the hope of their family as well as society and the Church.

Unfortunately, the following categories of children are subjected to intolerable treatment:

- aborted babies;
- orphans;
- albinos;
- street children;
- abandoned children;
- child soldiers;
- child prisoners;
- child labourers;
- physically and mentally challenged children;
- child accused of witchcraft;
- children sold as sex slaves;
- traumatized children without any Christian orientation or human prospects;
- etc.

The Synod Fathers call upon the local Churches to develop within the framework of their pastoral activity for children special attention to these children in situations where they are particularly vulnerable, and that in the Catholic Schools they receive the Word of God, psychological help, a culture of justice and peace, and learn a trade, so that they can become good and healthy members of society.

Proposition 50

Persons with Disabilities

Many persons in our societies are mentally or physically challenged, and oftentimes, marginalized.

The Synod, remembering the right of to life of persons with disabilities, proposes that:

-- every effort be made to ensure their full integration in society and our ecclesial communities, so that they can exercise their gifts, realize their potential, and fully experience the reconciling presence of Christ in the community; and

-- programmes be established to encourage their integration into pastoral planning in our dioceses and our local Church communities.